

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 13694 01 OF 02 220034Z

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAJ-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01

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SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 /057 W

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R 211708Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4959

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 13694

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TO TEXTS NBRD PARA TWO)

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: UK, PINT

SUBJECT: CONSERVATIVES' LEADERSHIP CONTROVERSY

REF: LONDON 13402, 13437

SUMMARY: SIR KEITH JOSEPH INTRODUCED A NEW ELEMENT INTO
THE SPECULATION ABOUT CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERSHIP WITH
A SPEECH IN BIRMINGHAM OCTOBER 19. JOSEPH ATTACKED
"PERMISSIVENESS" IN SOCIETY AND URGED "REMORALIZATION"
OF BRITAIN. MEDIA COMMENT HAS FOCUSED ON HIS SPEECH AS
A "BID" FOR CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP AND ON REMARKS HE
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PAGE 02 LONDON 13694 01 OF 02 220034Z

MADE ON NEED FOR BIRTH CONTROL IN CONNECTION WITH CER-

TAIN SOCIAL GROUPS.

HEATH SAID LAST WEEK HE WILL MEET WITH NEW 1922 COMMITTEE AFTER OCTOBER 31, PARTY CHAIRMAN WHITELAW HAS EQUIVOCATED, AND 1922 COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN (DU CANN) HAS TRIED TO QUIET SPECULATION. THOUGH HEATH STILL HOLDS INITIATIVE, HE IS BEING URGED TO DECIDE BY CHRISTMAS EITHER TO RESIGN OR STAND FOR RE-ELECTION. END SUMMARY.

1. HEATH WENT MILDLY ON THE OFFENSIVE IN REPLYING TO SPECULATION ABOUT HIS CONTINUING AS LEADER OF CONSERVATIVES. IN A LETTER LAST WEEK TO THE 1922 COMMITTEE, WHICH SERVES AS AN EXECUTIVE ORGAN OF THE PARTY, ELECTING OFFICERS AND MEMBERS OF THE PARTY EXECUTIVE, HEATH SAID HE WOULD BE HAPPY TO MEET THE NEWLY-ELECTED EXECUTIVE AFTER OCTOBER 31, AND IF INVITED, THE 1922 COMMITTEE AS A WHOLE TO HEAR AND DISCUSS "VIEWS OF OUR PARLIAMENTARY COLLEAGUES ON ANY QUESTIONS . . . ABOUT THE BEST WAY FORWARD FOR US AS A PARTY IN OPPOSITION." HE NEXT CALLED, IN EFFECT, FOR A CESSATION OF THE BICKERING IN ORDER FOR CONSERVATIVES TO PROVIDE A UNITED, VIGOROUS AND EFFECTIVE OPPOSITION.

2. WITH HIS STATEMENT, HEATH LEFT NO DOUBT THAT HE CONSIDERS HIMSELF STILL LEADER OF THE PARTY AND WILL SO REMAIN UNTIL THE COMMITTEE IS NEWLY RECONSTITUTED BY CONSERVATIVE MEMBERS OF THE NEW PARLIAMENT. IMPLICITLY HE WAS CRITICAL OF THE SPECULATION ABOUT HIS BEING REPLACED WHICH EARLIER MEETINGS OF THE 1922 COMMITTEE CALLED BY CHAIRMAN EDWARD DU CANN HAD STIMULATED. IN THE MEANTIME, AN EMBASSY SOURCE IN CONSERVATIVE PARTY HEADQUARTERS REPORTS A FLOOD OF CORRESPONDENCE FROM PARTY MEMBERS WHICH OVERWHELMINGLY URGES HEATH TO REMAIN.

3. DU CANN, IN A LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES, OCTOBER 18, TRIED TO ESTABLISH THE REASONABLENESS OF THE TWO MEETINGS OF THE 1922 COMMITTEE, NOTING THAT THEY HAD BEEN SCHEDULED EVEN BEFORE THE ELECTION. HE SAID THAT THE MEETINGS WERE HELD FOR THREE MAIN PURPOSES: TO MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR ELECTION OF COMMITTEE REPRESENTATIVES LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 LONDON 13694 01 OF 02 220034Z

IN THE NEW PARLIAMENT, TO ARRANGE A DATE FOR THE FIRST MEETING OF THE FULL 1922 COMMITTEE, AND TO CONSIDER THE ELECTION AND ITS AFTERMATH. EXPLAINING THE ALLEGEDLY "SECRETEIVE" ATMOSPHERE OF THE MEETINGS, DU CANN SAID THEY HAD BEEN HELD IN HIS HOME AND HIS OFFICE BECAUSE PARLIAMENT WAS THEN NOT SITTING. HE FURTHER DEPRECATED THE USE OF SUCH WORDS AS "MAFIA, CABAL AND KNIVES" IN REGARD TO THESE MEETINGS.

4. PARTY CHAIRMAN WHITELAW ALSO ISSUED HIS OWN STATEMENT OCTOBER 18 WHICH WAS SUITABLY EQUIVOCAL. WHILE PROFESSING CONTINUING ADMIRATION AND SUPPORT OF HEATH, WHITELAW SAID THAT ALL MEMBERS OF THE PARTY ARE ENTITLED TO THEIR OWN VIEWS ABOUT THE LEADERSHIP OF THE PARTY; HE ALSO CALLED FOR THE PARTY TO PUT THE NATION FIRST AT THIS TIME OF CRISIS, I.E., PULL TOGETHER.

5. BIGGEST SPLASH, HOWEVER, WAS REACTION TO SIR KEITH JOSEPH'S SPEECH IN BIRMINGHAM OCTOBER 19. SIR KEITH HAS PROMINENTLY FIGURED IN SPECULATION AS A HEATH SUCCESSOR.

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PAGE 01 LONDON 13694 02 OF 02 211723Z

51

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LIMITED OFFICIAL USE SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 13694

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HIS SPEECH, INTENDED AS A SERIOUS EXPRESSION OF CONSERVATIVE VIEWS ON A WIDE SPECTRUM (SOCIAL POLICIES, EDUCATION, MORALITY, ETC.), HAS BEEN DISTORTED BY PRESS COMMENTS WHICH FOCUSED HEAVILY ON HIS REMARKS ABOUT THE NEED FOR BIRTH CONTROL TO PREVENT "DEGENERATION" OF THE NATION IN VIEW OF REPORTS OF A HIGHER BIRTHRATE IN POORER AND LESS INTELLIGENT GROUPS IN THE SOCIETY. THE SPEECH HAS PRODUCED A LOT OF COMMENT FROM WITHIN THE PARTY AND OUTSIDE, AND A FURTHER EXPLANATION FROM JOSEPH HIMSELF TO THE EFFECT THAT HE HAD NOT INTENDED THAT HIS SPEECH BE CONSIDERED A BID FOR PARTY LEADERSHIP AND THAT HIS REMARKS ON BIRTH CONTROL HAD BEEN "NAIVE."

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PAGE 02 LONDON 13694 02 OF 02 211723Z

6. COMMENT: JOSEPH CANNOT HAVE BEEN UNAWARE THAT ANYTHING HE SAID AT THIS TIME WOULD GET TOP ATTENTION BY THE MEDIA IN VIEW OF THE PROMINENCE WITH WHICH HIS NAME HAS BEEN FEATURED IN DISCUSSING THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY LEADERSHIP. HIS REMARKS ON BIRTH CONTROL WERE BOUND TO ATTRACT A LOT OF CONTROVERSIAL COMMENT AND HE APPEARS EITHER NAIVE OR POLITICALLY INEPT TO HAVE INCLUDED THEM AT THIS TIME. WITHOUT THEM, HIS SPEECH WOULD HAVE BEEN WHAT HE PROBABLY INTENDED: A RESTRAINED RESTATEMENT OF CONSERVATIVE VIEWS AND A CALL FOR "REMORALIZATION" OF BRITAIN. WITH THEM, HE MAY HAVE SEVERELY JEOPARDIZED HIS POSSIBILITIES FOR SUCCEEDING HEATH. HE FURTHERMORE APPEARS TO HAVE ENCOURAGED PRESS ATTENTION ON HIS SPEECH BY RELEASING FULL TEXTS TO THE PRESS SEVERAL HOURS IN ADVANCE, POSSIBLY ALSO POLITICALLY UNWISE.

7. IN AN ARTICLE IN FINANCIAL TIMES OCTOBER 18, ONE OF THE MOST PERCEPTIVE POLITICAL ANALYSTS (DAVID WATT) CONCLUDED ON BALANCE THAT HEATH HAS BECOME A LIABILITY FOR THE PARTY AND HIS REPLACEMENT WOULD NOT CREATE AS MUCH A THREAT TO PARTY UNITY AS HIS REMAINING. WATT ALSO EXPLAINED THE BALLOTING PROCESS FOR ELECTION OF THE LEADER: ON THE FIRST TWO BALLOTS OF CONSERVATIVE MPS THE WINNING CANDIDATE MUST RECEIVE AN OVERALL MAJORITY AND 15 PERCENT MORE OF THE VOTES THAN ANY OTHER CANDIDATE. WATT FORESAW (BEFORE JOSEPH'S SPEECH) THAT, OF POSSIBLE CANDIDATES, ONLY SIR KEITH JOSEPH WOULD CONTEST AN ELECTION AGAINST HEATH AND HE DOUBTED JOSEPH WOULD BE ACCEPTED WITHIN THE PARTY. WHITELAW IS, IN WATT'S OPINION, THE MOST WIDELY ACCEPTABLE CANDIDATE, THOUGH HE HAS INSPIRED THE "ANIMOSITY OF THE RIGHT AND SKEPTICISM OF THE CENTER OF THE PARTY" AND IS TAINTED BY LONG LOYALTY TO HEATH. THE PROSPECTS OF EVEN GREATER DISUNITY IN THE PARTY MAY ENCOURAGE CONSERVATIVE MPS TO MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO,

WATT SAID, BUT THEY WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY BE FRIGHTENED OF GOING INTO ANOTHER ELECTION WITH HEATH AS LEADER.

8. BALL REMAINS IN HEATH'S COURT, HOWEVER, AND THE FUROR OVER JOSEPH'S SPEECH MIGHT WELL IMPROVE HEATH'S CHANCES OF REMAINING LEADER. CONSERVATIVE MP HESELTINE, WHO IS SHADOW MINISTER ON TRADE AND INDUSTRY, SAID ON TELEVISION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 LONDON 13694 02 OF 02 211723Z

SION OCTOBER 20 THAT HEATH WAS DOING THE RIGHT THING IN WAITING FOR THE CONSERVATIVE PARLIAMENTARY PARTY TO ASSEMBLE BEFORE MAKING UP HIS MIND, BUT HE ARGUED THAT HEATH SHOULD DECIDE BEFORE CHRISTMAS EITHER TO RESIGN OR STAND FOR RE-ELECTION.

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